



Roy Cooper North Carolina Attorney General

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Attorney General Cooper calls for comprehensive fight against child predators

AG seeks tougher laws against child pornography, more tools for law enforcement

RALEIGH: Stopping sexual predators who victimize children requires better detection and tougher penalties once they're found, Attorney General Roy Cooper said Monday.

Cooper is presenting legislators with a comprehensive package of changes to state law that will increase punishment, give law enforcement better ways to track down offenders and require those who discover pedophiles to turn them in.

It would also require social networking websites to get parents' permission before their children share personal information that would leave them vulnerable to a predator.

"Child predators operate in secret, and uncovering their crimes means that law enforcement and prosecutors have to be aggressive and effective," Cooper said. "These changes will give investigators the tools they need while we work to save the children they victimize."

In the proposal sponsored by Senator Walter Dalton and Senator John Snow, Cooper is asking legislators to make the following changes:

- Strengthen criminal penalties for possession, dissemination and production of child pornography
- Require computer technicians and photo developers to report child pornography to law enforcement
- Require social networking websites like MySpace to get parents' permission before children can join
- Increase the penalty for soliciting minors for sex over the Internet when the predator shows up at a meeting place in order to sexually assault the child
- Expand state law regarding pornography to include additional offenses of child exposure, as federal law does
- Make lying to a State Bureau of Investigation agent a felony
- Allow prosecutors to use investigative grand jury

"In the right hands, the computer is a wonderful tool, but in the wrong hands it's a weapon," said Sen. Dalton. "I'm glad to work with the Attorney General to protect our children from predators."

“We need to make sure North Carolina is doing all it can do to stop child predators,” said Sen. John Snow. “We’re pushing for these tougher laws to protect our kids.”

Cooper has established a special unit at the SBI to catch Internet predators who hunt children. A recent statewide sweep to stop file sharing programs that allow criminals to sell child pornography yielded 58 search warrants on suspects in Wilmington, Greenville, Rocky Mount, Fayetteville, Raleigh, Cary, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Charlotte, Boone, Asheville and other cities.

To help track Internet predators who try to exploit children, Cooper is also asking legislators to expand the SBI’s Computer Crimes Unit by adding four new field agents. These agents would partner with the national Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, a network of law enforcement agencies and prosecutors which protect children from online dangers.

Incidents of child exploitation in North Carolina are increasing. Reports increased to more than 400 in 2006, up from 252 in 2005, according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, which tracks reports.

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